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Buddy DeFranco named NEA Jazz Master

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NEWS RELEASE

Sept. 13, 2005

Contact: Victoria Hutter, National Endowment for the Arts, (202) 682-5692,
hutterv@arts.endow.gov.

BUDDY DEFranco NAMED NEA JAZZ MASTER

MISSOULA –

Buddy DeFranco is among the living legends of American music to join the ranks of National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters.

NEA Chairman Dana Gioia announced the seven new winners of the Jazz Master title at a press conference in New York City on Tuesday.

DeFranco, a part-time resident of **Whitefish**, is the namesake of the jazz festival held annually at The University of Montana. Each April, DeFranco and other jazz greats come to take part in UM's Buddy DeFranco Jazz Festival, which is a celebration of jazz performance and education.

"When I think of all the excellent musicians there are in this world, to be chosen as a recipient of this great award is indeed an honor," DeFranco said.

DeFranco, who began playing the clarinet at age nine, bridged the swing and bebop eras of jazz. At 14, he won a national Tommy Dorsey Swing Contest and appeared on the "Saturday Night Swing Club" with Gene Krupa. Johnny "Scat" Davis soon tapped him for his big band, inaugurating his road career in 1939.

DeFranco subsequently played in the bands of Gene Krupa and Charlie Barnet and in 1944 became a featured soloist with Tommy Dorsey. Meanwhile, the modern jazz revolution was in progress, led by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. DeFranco became the first jazz clarinetist

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to make his mark in the new idiom of bebop.

He joined the famous Count Basie Septet in 1950 and toured Europe with Billie Holiday in 1954. Throughout his career, DeFranco has performed concerts and recorded with jazz greats Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, Nat King Cole, Mel Torme, Ray Brown and Louie Bellson, among others. In 1966 he became the leader of the Glenn Miller Orchestra, a post he maintained until 1974.

Since the mid 1970s DeFranco has combined a busy teaching career with extensive touring and recording. He has played at concerts and festivals throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina.

To date, DeFranco has recorded more than 160 albums. He has won the Downbeat All Stars award 20 times and the Metronome poll 12 times.

Named NEA Jazz Masters with DeFranco were Ray Barretto (percussion), Tony Bennett (vocal), Bob Brookmeyer (arranger-composer), Chick Corea (keyboard), Freddy Hubbard (trumpet) and John Levy (jazz advocate). The seven will receive their awards in January 2006 at a gala concert in New York City.

Initiated in 1982, the NEA Jazz Master title is the nation's highest honor in this distinctively American art form.

"Jazz began, developed and flourished in the United States," Gioia said. "It is a vital part of our nation's history and cultural heritage. This class of NEA Jazz Masters demonstrates an exciting breadth of styles that speaks to the richness of the jazz tradition."

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